

# News analysis

## Smoke-free laws do not harm profits: new global report

As increasing numbers of governments ban smoking in workplaces, including hospitality venues such as bars and restaurants, the protestations of the tobacco industry are heard louder and ever more desperate, trying to convince employers that it is bad for business. We should not be surprised that economic arguments are being used as if employment and profits were preferable to passive smoking disease reduction—after all, the huge burden of premature death caused by active smoking never stopped the industry trying to dilute tobacco control policies on the grounds of supposed damage to the economy. What is surprising, as well as alarming, is the way the commercial world still swallows what the tobacco spin doctors serve up as evidence about workplace bans.

Among the most discussed bans in Europe has been the one implemented in Ireland. Reports of its economic effects have ranged from claims of doom and gloom among publicans, put about by the industry side, to reports of increased pub sales. There have even been whispered admissions in Dublin that takings are up so much, as non-smoking pub-goers return to enjoy the buzz and chat of the capital's famous watering holes, that some publicans do not want to divulge too many details for fear of inspections of tax records that may not always be entirely comprehensive and up to date.

A new report presented at the Smoke-free Europe conference in Luxembourg in June shows that ending smoking in all workplaces and enclosed public places has not damaged the economy in the many countries, cities, and states around the world that have adopted such legislation. A Europe wide trend to drink more alcohol at home and less in bars and pubs appears to account for the apparent downturn in trade after the Irish smoke-free legislation was introduced in 2004.

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Luk Joossens, Advocacy Officer for the Association of European Cancer Leagues, compared statistics from regions that have introduced smoke-free legislation, and compiled new data on drinking trends from across Europe.

He said, "Tobacco companies are at pains to show that smoking bans in bars and restaurants have a negative impact on business and lead to drops in sales and job losses. They frequently use anecdotal facts and speculative projections to make these claims. But rigorous analysis of studies from Ireland, New York, British Columbia and other places shows that smoke-free legislation does not damage profits. In some places it could even have a positive economic effect."

Joossens only analysed research that met stringent quality criteria and had been funded by a source with no links to the tobacco industry. He also examined economic trends before the introduction of bans. The main argument used by the tobacco industry to try to avert bans is that drinking and smoking go together, and if that were the case, a ban on smoking in pubs would be expected to affect Ireland, whose citizens drink more in bars than any other European nationality. But the evidence shows that the ban did not affect Ireland's bar economy. In fact, objective measures such as till receipts and peer reviewed research show that going smoke-free has not damaged the economy of any country examined so far.

Although representatives of the Irish hospitality industry have estimated losses in the pub trade of 15–20% since the ban was enforced, the actual decrease in sales of alcohol was in line with declines that started in 2002, which follow a Europe wide trend towards consuming more alcohol at home. In Ireland, the estimated share of beer sales consumed in private homes has almost doubled, from 12% in 2000 to 23% in 2003.

No doubt fuelled by panic and false data emanating from the tobacco industry, the hospitality industries in countries considering smoke-free legislation tends to overplay its hand. For example, a Belgian hospitality trade mission to Ireland reported that an Irish style ban in Belgium would lead to between 20 000 and 40 000 job losses—yet its own website showed that only 14 183 people worked in drinking places in Belgium in 2003.



**Sri Lanka: Marlboro imitation time** In common with many countries where cigarette promotion has saturated the marketplace, numerous other products, such as this clock on sale in Colombo, "borrow" the most promoted names and logos to try to enhance their value in the eyes of consumers.

The new report will not stop attempts by the tobacco and hospitality industries to fight smoke-free legislation, but it does provide health advocates with a useful resource to help convince politicians to do the right thing. The report, *Smoke Free Europe makes economic sense: a report on the economic aspects of smoke free policies*, can be obtained from the Smokefree Europe 2005 website ([http://www.smokefreeeurope.com/economic\\_report.htm](http://www.smokefreeeurope.com/economic_report.htm)).

## Smoking still in Vogue, Italian style

Fashion and smoking have been inextricably linked for decades. Models smoke on catwalks (and not just when wearing Yves St Laurent's iconic Le Smoking trouser suit) and in fashion spreads. Supermodels such as Naomi Campbell and Kate Moss appear in the celebrity press smoking in "real life". And some fashion designers are happy to associate their brand and products with smoking, such as the ads for Gucci handbags that appeared in several top European fashion magazines last autumn showing cigarette ash "stylishly" scattered across their expensive bags.

It therefore was a surprise to many when earlier this year Italy, arguably the